

“My Germany”
Speech given by Consul General Powell
on the invitation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Wiesbaden
Crown Plaza Hotel Wiesbaden
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Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Ehlen
Sehr geehrte Mitglieder der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung,
Liebe Gäste,

zunächst einmal möchte ich mich recht herzlich für die Gelegenheit bedanken, Ihnen meine Eindrücke und Einsichten von Ihrem Land mitzuteilen, die ich in den letzten zweieinhalb Jahren gesammelt habe. Dass daran so viele von Ihnen Interesse haben, ehrt mich.

I arrived here in Germany in September of 2006 to assume my duties as Consul General of the United States in Frankfurt responsible for the states of Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saarland. When I leave Germany later this year, I will have spent three years in your country - three years full of personal encounters with Germans of all walks of life, of all ages and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. On my travels I have visited state capitals and small villages, state chancelleries and company headquarters, universities and elementary schools, churches, synagogues and mosques. Not to mention museums, cultural institutions, and private homes.

The diversity of my experiences is so much more than a “typical” image of Germany as a Brothers Grimm landscape of gnomes, castles, forests. The reality is an incredibly complex tapestry of history and the cutting edge of tomorrow. Whatever I say about “My Germany” needs to be followed by a strong “but.” And, I ask myself, doesn’t that also hold true for any attempt to describe “My America”?

I saw the incredibly dynamic side of Germany right when I landed at Frankfurt Airport, one of Europe’s and the world’s busiest hubs. I can honestly say that Frankfurt Airport is one of the main reasons that Consulate General Frankfurt is the largest US consulate in the world, with 900 people carrying out regional responsibilities to support 170 US diplomatic missions around the world. Over 50 million travelers pass through Frankfurt airport every year;

I wish that more of them would leave the airport for a few days, and get to know the city of Frankfurt and the region around it, a region that is home to some of Germany's most iconic landmarks and historic turning points.

In my time in Germany, I have seen the cutting edge of the future, on factory floors and the laboratories of universities and international high-tech companies. Whether it be solar energy in Freiburg, medical technology at Fresenius in Frankfurt, chemicals and pharmaceuticals at BASF, or automobiles at Opel, Porsche and Mercedes - I am deeply impressed by the modern and international competitiveness of German research, science, technology, and industry.

But I have also been able to enjoy and appreciate the local color and tradition that so many Americans associate with Germany. I am a huge fan of art and architecture, and I have made it my priority to visit many of the landmark historical sites in my consular district. The marvelous carved altarpieces of Tilman Riemenschneider, the elegant structures of Maulbronn, the Abbey of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Heidelberg Castle, and the splendid Kurhaus right here in Wiesbaden are just a few examples. And who cannot appreciate the rich collection of art in the Städel in Frankfurt, or the breathtaking beauty of the Frieder Burda museum and collection in Baden-Baden, with its stunning building designed by the American architect Richard Meyer housing one of the finest collections of contemporary art in the world? And I always look forward to the Christmas markets, and to a springtime luncheon of asparagus and Riesling at the lovely terrace restaurant of Burg Schwarzenstein in the Rheingau.

Living in Frankfurt – which is so rightly proud of its most famous son Goethe - I am constantly reminded of Germany's rich cultural and intellectual history. The literary, musical and artistic achievements of the sons and daughters hailing from this area alone are truly impressive and I am gratified to see how this heritage is preserved, kept alive and passed on from one generation to the next. I especially enjoy the Rheingau Musik Festival, and the sweeping music of Mahler and Bach played by some of the finest musicians in Europe, with American conductor Paavo Järvi from Cincinnati, Ohio, in the beautiful setting of Kloster Eberbach. And the Alte Oper and Frankfurt Opera House are world-class venues for the performing arts as well.

One stereotype of Germany that I am happy to debunk is that Germans have no sense of humor. To the contrary! And I am not only referring to the famous seasonal eruptions of Carnival in Mainz, Cologne and Düsseldorf. It is to be found everywhere at any time. The remarkable way Germans, particularly young

Germans, warmly welcomed a wave of visitors during the soccer world championship of 2006 and celebrated with them, even after Germany's team was eliminated, with exuberance and joyfulness, and without violence.

German history, of course, has not always been joyful or peaceful. Spiritual and intellectual movements transformed much of the religious and political landscape within and beyond the German borders. Martin Luther's critique of some of the practices of his church eventually led the Reformation and Counter-Reformation with long-term and far-reaching consequences.

Germany has been at the epicenter of the European battleground for centuries. The hotbed of the internal struggles for Germany's political future in the 19th century was right here in our consular district. The Paulskirche in Frankfurt is an eloquent symbol for me of Germany's long and difficult path to unity and democracy. Many refugees of the failed revolution of 1848/49, immigrated to the United States, helping to make our country strong and prosperous.

Towards the end of the 19th century, both Germany and the United States had developed into economic and political powers, and contemporaries speculated whether the 20th century was to become an American or a German century. A tragic course of history made our two countries enemies in two disastrous wars. At the end of World War II, Germany laid in ruins, in more than one sense of the word.

But the United States [was prepared to extend the hand of peace and reconstruction to a former foe. U.S. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes's famous Speech of Hope in Stuttgart, and the Berlin Airlift flying out of Rhein Main and Wiesbaden Army Air Field paved the way for economic, political and moral recovery, at least in West Germany. During the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Berlin airlift in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, I had the privilege to meet airlift veteran Gale Halverson and his comrades, and to hear firsthand from German friends how their lives were changed by the kindness of these American soldiers. American support and German resolve combined to make a miracle possible. Germany determined once and for all to overcome age-old animosities with neighboring countries and to play a leading role in building a peaceful, unified Europe.

For Germans, this meant first coming to grips with the horrors of the past. My visit to Bad Arolsen for the opening of the International Tracing Service archives was an emotional, moving day for me. I realized how the very records that

symbolize what Hannah Arendt famously called “the banality of evil” have been transformed into a tool to help people discover and learn from a terrible past.

Just as the situation in post-war Germany seemed so utterly hopeless, so it seemed unrealistic for a long time to imagine the reunification of Germany. Like most of you, I remember President Reagan’s words “Mr. Gorbachev – tear down this wall!” Even in May of 1989, when former President Bush, said in Mainz that “that wall stands as a monument to the failure of communism. It must come down,” reunification was a distant dream. The night when East Germans forced the opening of the wall and danced on top of it with their West Berlin neighbors was a joyful moment, not only for you but also for we Americans.

The reunification of Germany constituted a German-American triumph of political vision and diplomatic skill we can all be proud of. In October 2007, I had the honor of giving the keynote speech on German Unity Day at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, the cradle of German democracy and unity, where such distinguished Americans as President John F. Kennedy and George Kennan had spoken before me. The honor of the invitation, and the warm reception I received, will be with me the rest of my life.

60 years after the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and 20 years after the fall of the wall Germany has reemerged as a leading political and economic power which has assumed many new responsibilities - in the Balkans, Afghanistan and many other of the world’s areas of conflict. Throughout, Germany has shown itself to be a reliable friend and ally. I was strongly reminded of this at the commemoration of the 5th anniversary of 9/11, when Frankfurt’s Lord Mayor Petra Roth and I rededicated a memorial stone laid down by the City of Frankfurt in front of the old Amerika Haus in a touching gesture of solidarity and friendship.

I have been impressed by the activism of the many organizations like yours which make up German civil society, quite contrary to the view that Germans rely on their government for everything. I admire the great work that foundations like Quandt, Hertie, Bosch, and Polytechnische Gesellschaft are doing – such as Polytechnische Stiftung’s “Stadtteil Botschafter” program, which provides seed funding and guidance for young people to implement programs of their own initiative in their neighborhoods.

Meeting and reaching out to young Germans has always been a major focus and pleasure of mine. During school visits kids performed for me and showed me

around their school. I remember introducing our Windows on America program at schools in our consular district, like the Emil-Gött-Schule in Freiburg, where Lord Mayor Dieter Salomon and I talked to students and their families about an all-expenses paid trip to the United States, or the Pestalozzi-Schule in Ludwigshafen, where the enthusiasm was so palpable that the teens were literally jumping up and down with excitement. It reaffirmed my conviction that the U.S. remains an alluring destination, and it also reaffirmed my positive impression of German teachers who dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to young people. And how can I forget our Germany-wide project “The Streets of Wedding” in which a group of Berlin high school students performed a show they had written themselves, in theaters all around Germany, under the direction of an American producer and choreographer.

Hesse’s large proportion of citizens of immigrant background – in 2005 23% of all Hessians had at least one foreign-born parent, a larger proportion than in the United States – gave me an opportunity to work with Sue Timken, wife of former Ambassador Timken, and the visionary women of Frankfurt’s Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish, and Muslim communities to launch an interfaith dialogue across religious and ethnic lines in an attempt to move beyond mutual prejudices and stereotypes.

During my time as Consul General I have been privileged to become acquainted with prominent figures in the public and private sectors, as well many promising young people who will, I am certain, some day rise to prominence. I have been privileged to speak to distinguished audiences like you, but also blessed with simple pleasures, like getting to know my neighbors while walking my dog in Frankfurt’s beautiful parks. The personal and professional friendships I have forged here leave me no doubt that our two countries can and will continue to enjoy close relations at every level – government to government, and person to person.

The opening of the American embassy building at its original pre-war site right next to the Brandenburg Gate last year is a powerful symbol of the American history in Germany. That Barack Obama chose Berlin for his only trip abroad during his election campaign says something about how important Germany is to the United States. And the extraordinary reception he received by 200,000 Germans in Berlin gives every indication that his election as 44th president of the United States, which I was able to celebrate with 1500 Germans and Americans at our all night election party in Frankfurt, will further strengthen our German-American partnership. My visits to wounded American soldiers with Ambassador

and Mrs Timken at the Landstuhl hospital remind me of the world's many trouble spots which require our joint attention and cooperation.

So at this moment, a few months away from my departure from Germany, I look back with deep satisfaction and gratitude and I look forward with great optimism to the future relationship between My America and My Germany. Thank you!